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RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 3600
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TIRANA 000727

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER IR AL

SUBJECT: (C) DEMARCHE ON IRANIAN ACTIVITIES IN ALBANIA

REF: EUR/SCE-TIRANA NOVEMBER 10 EMAIL

Classified By: DCM Deborah A. Jones, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) On November 11 DCM delivered reftel points to Deputy Foreign Minister Edith Harxhi. Harxhi agreed fully with U.S. concerns regarding proposed trade and cultural agreements between the governments of Iran and Albania and direct commercial air traffic between Tehran and Tirana.

¶2. (C) Deputy Minister Harxhi assured the DCM that Albania will not sign the cultural or trade agreements with Iran. She also said that the MFA will weigh in with the Albanian Civil Aviation Authority against approval of direct flights between Tehran and Tirana. Harxhi said that the flights cannot commence without MFA concurrence, and assured DCM that such approval will be denied. According to Harxhi, Albanian Airlines is expected to present a proposal on the flights soon, at which time she said the approval will be denied.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: Iran's new activism in Albania is worrisome, particularly in light of the country's weakened coalition government and the open desire of certain new ministers (e.g. Minister of the Economy Dritan Prifti) to utilize their positions to replenish their personal coffers. This makes them vulnerable to Iranian emissaries with plenty of cash on hand. We need be in no doubt about Deputy FM Harxhi's assurances to oppose Tehran's new initiatives. Nevertheless, we will have to remain vigilant against continued Iranian attempts to establish footholds in Albania. END COMMENT.

WITHERS